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RUSSIA AND THE REVOLUTION

BY CHARLES JOHNSTON

MODERN Russia has given to the world many great pages of tremendous realism; none greater, vividder, more poignant than those that have come to us, self-written, self-edited, since the Ides of March. Not Turgenieff nor Tolstoi, nor Gorki nor Verestchagin, not even Dostoyevski himself ever drew more powerful outlines or mixed more compelling colors than those that have framed themselves from the abrupt phrases of the cablegrams. And how like the handling of the great Russian realists the whole drama has been: the figures have drawn themselves, the scenes have been set, the very persons have spoken, in the style that is unmistakably Russian: intense conviction, amazing vividness, deep religious emotion, an abiding sense of the eternal things!

Not Tolstoi nor Dostoyevski at their best conceived a more arresting figure than Rasputin: the huge, gaunt Siberian, shaggy and eloquent, half-visionary, half-charlatan, with his blazing eyes, his extraordinary power of fascinating women, his towering ambition, his wild profligacy, setting forth barefoot from primeval forests to enthrall the world; taking Petrograd by storm, for long months holding the Empire in the hollow of his hand, Church and State alike; hurled violently from power as a detected impostor; by force and craft breaking a way back again, once more appointing archbishops and ministers, dictating policies; giving himself up, drunken with insolence and wine, into the hands of Russia's most treacherous enemies, and coming within a hand's-breadth of ruining the cause of the nation, the still greater cause of the Allies; finally slain by a great noble, quite openly, as a mad dog is slain; his body thrown into the icy Neva; drawn forth again, carried in state by ministers, laid in a silver coffin borne on the shoulders of the Emperor and his ministers,

wept by the Empress in mourning garments: no novelist would have dared to paint a picture like that.

The figure of the Emperor, too, comes forth into the pitiless light with a certain pathetic dignity. Nicholas the Second was no mere incompetent or voluptuary; on the contrary, of irreproachable life, austere, gentle, almost puritanical, he stands among the great idealists of the world. We must not forget that it was he who dreamed the noble dream of The Hague Tribunal and the world's peace; that he himself framed and put into execution the system of the Imperial Duma which has now been able to save Russia from his almost fatal blunders; that he planned, and in part carried out, large schemes for the amelioration of the immense army of Russian villagers, so that his great nobles angrily reproached him with being "a peasant's king"; that he chose and loyally supported ministers of extraordinary ability and power—men like Witte, who doubled the income of the Empire within ten years, like Stolypin, who worked out the enfranchisement of the peasants, not from monarchical oppression, but from the shackles of the old village socialism, which had come down from the immemorial past; like Sazonoff, who alone among the Entente statesmen seems to have understood the real purpose of Germany, and whose incisive vigor stands out in very favorable contrast with the hair-splitting hesitancy of a diplomatist as able, as gifted, as scrupulous as Lord Grey; finally, that Nicholas the Second, like his grandfather Alexander the Second, embarked his nation on a great crusade, impelled by motives largely religious and humane, for the salvation of the Balkan Slavs; that for nearly three years he co-operated loyally with France and England, putting himself at the head of his armies when the enemy entered on Russian soil.

The very causes of his undoing, too, have their large element of time-old tragedy. Nicholas was not the first, nor will he be the last, to yield up judgment and will into the hands of a queenly and beautiful woman. The motive of Samson and Delilah of the vale of Sorek is a scarlet thread that runs through all history. And the Empress Alexandra herself, a broken-hearted woman from the beginning, was led to the brink of the precipice by forces of tremendous and universal strength: her passionate and morbid love for her invalid son, born after long waiting, whose pains were alleviated, it would seem, by Rasputin's magnetic force, just as

the fatal malady of the Czar's father, Alexander the Third, was lightened by the similar but more benign power of Father John of Cronstadt; her obstinate and unconverted devotion for the land of her birth; her passion for autocratic power. These are not vulgar or trivial motives; they have swayed great souls through all history.

The element of mysticism, even though it be a morbid and dangerous mysticism, runs through the whole drama. We shall, I think, be quite misled if we think of it as merely vulgar charlatanism, like Carlyle's probable misreading of Cagliostro. Nicholas the Second, like all Russians who are true to their blood, was impressed and oppressed by the presence of the invisible world. We must not forget that the Russian Church has always been, and is today, pre-eminently a church of men, in sharp contrast with modern Roman Catholicism, which has so largely tended to become a church of women; that the presence of a majority of men at church services is as much the rule in Russia as it is the exception, let us say, in France, or was, at any rate, in the years before the war; and that all these men are full of the sense of the supernatural, ardently revering their miracle-working saints, in no way thinking that the age of immediate divine interventions has passed. Nor can we venture to say, in these days of revived belief in the invisible, that the Russian millions are wrong. It is this universal mood which gives a Rasputin his power and opportunity, just as it gave power and opportunity to the benign influence of Father John of Cronstadt. And Nicholas the Second was as fully possessed by this mystical sensibility as any of his peasants. Stumbling in the midst of mighty difficulties, he longed for oracles from heaven, to make his intricate pathway clearer through the darkness. And if, blinded by devotion to the beautiful woman who dominated him, he followed lying oracles, it is no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. That fatally dangerous masquerade is the experience of saints and visionaries through all history.

Not less striking or less dramatic are the personalities of the men who brought about this marvellous revolution, unprecedented in its quietude and restraint. They won their power by service and sacrifice. They were at the point of vantage, where they could guide the transformation scene, because they had fought their way up by active, able, beneficent work. Prince Lvoff, the new Prime Minister, had held

together the great national union of Zemstvos, the popular District Councils which bear a certain analogy to our State legislatures, and which have been doing indispensable service in supporting the armies of Russia and supplying them with food and clothing, in part with munitions also. It was primarily the resistance of the former ministers to this great popular organ of Russian life, a resistance supinely permitted by Nicholas the Second, that brought the revolution to a head. It is characteristic, too, of Russia, and of the large lines on which this whole drama has been laid, that Prince Lvoff, the universally trusted leader of this organization of the people, is no demagogue suddenly risen to power by the arts of flattery, but an aristocrat of one of the oldest houses in Russia, going back to Rurik, the heroic ruler who first welded together the Russian nation. To be a "Rurikovitch," a descendant of Rurik, is the equivalent to descent, in England, from the nobles on the Battle Abbey roll.

Rodzianko has, in his own field, gained equal power by equal service. As President of the Duma, he deserves to be compared with the great Speakers of the Mother of Parliaments, whose wise guidance has gradually built up the constitutional practice of the world, framing the machinery by which all nations on earth are governed, in large degree, to-day. Again and again, in hours of parliamentary crisis, this able Moderator, whose name shows him to be of South Russian, perhaps of Cossack, descent, has shown that he possesses courage, wise judgment, sympathy, personal ascendancy and entire disinterestedness in a rare degree. His great co-adjutor, Milyukoff, is well-known in this country. Again and again, he has shown that self-forgetting acceptance of sacrifice for a moral ideal, which, for nearly a century now, has been so characteristic of the Russian revolutionaries, even of those whose methods of outrage and terrorism can never be condoned. Some of these men and women were guilty of grave crimes as well as frightful blunders, like the assassination of Alexander the Second on the eve of his promulgation of a constitution; but they were all, without exception, capable of the extreme of self-sacrifice. But Milyukoff, though a revolutionary, has been no fanatic, no extremist. He has, on the contrary, shown a power of tolerance, of self-subordination, with practical statesmanship and fearlessness of the highest order. There has been nothing of the doctrinary bigot in his thought or in his action,

but rather the sanest vision and constructive power. Gutchkoff, too, the new War Minister, won his way by sturdy and far-sighted work in the Duma; he holds the admiration and trust of the Russian army and its able commanders.

Not less notable is the character of the great soldiers in command of the Russian armies, whose far-sighted, profoundly patriotic acceptance alone made the transformation of Russia possible and almost bloodless. Not one of them but made, quite consciously and no doubt with a full sense of the tragic greatness of the necessity, the choice between a real loyalty to the Emperor and the greater loyalty to eternal principles, whose victory was endangered by the Emperor's supine blindness. They also are men who have fought their way to power through self-sacrificing devotion to duty, unsullied by personal ambition. General Alexeieff, Chief of Staff when the great change was made, was one of a group of soldiers throughout all the belligerent nations, who have shown that military genius is as likely to be found in the classes who live close to the soil, as among princely houses built on military traditions. Like Marshal Joffre, like General Nivelle, like General Robertson, the backbone of the British army, Alexeieff rose to supreme command without the slightest aid from patronage or favoritism, by sheer personal power and soldierly gifts. The heroism of Russia's fighting generals, with General Brusiloff at their head, shines out brighter than ever, now that we know of the imperial sabotage of which their armies were the victims: the side-tracking of priceless munitions, the curt refusal of millions of rifles offered by Great Britain, the calculated disorganization of food and supplies. Protopopoff, in prison, bethinking him of these doings of his, is said to have asked for religious books. Protopopoff has, it would seem, had a rare, belated flash of self-understanding.

Yet I think we shall show ourselves limited judges of human nature if we suppose that he and his fellow-plotters consciously thought of themselves as traitors. They were deeply concerned for their own stability and comfort, which they conceived to be bound up with the triumph of autocracy, and therefore of German autocracy. They were offered enormous bribes, not for themselves only, but for Russia also, bribes that included, we are told, the return of Poland and the Baltic Provinces, immediate possession of Armenia and Constantinople—the Turks to be betrayed for this pur-

pose by their Teutonic Allies. There may have been promises for Serbia also; probably there were. And, in disorganizing the service of the Russian armies, these separate peace-seekers were taking, no doubt they told themselves, the speediest way to get their nation out of war. They may even have been moved by pacifist convictions, ready to pay this price for peace. We may remember that Benedict Arnold wrote, on board the *Vulture*, on September 25: "The heart which is conscious of its own rectitude cannot attempt to palliate a step which the world may censure as wrong. I have ever acted from a principle of love to my country since the commencement of the present unhappy contest between Great Britain and the Colonies. The same principle of love to my country actuates my present conduct, however it may appear inconsistent to the world, who very seldom judge right of any man's actions."

There is little doubt that Arnold sincerely believed this; small doubt that Stuermer and Protopopoff gave themselves the same assurances. That is the fatal thing about treason: it begins by betraying the traitor himself.

Public comment here has described the Russian revolution as "the fall of the Romanoffs; the discrediting of monarchy." I doubt very much that this is how the matter seems to the best and wisest men in Russia. We shall probably be right in thinking of many of these men as saying that a monarchy is in principle higher than a republic, in this at least: that the mainspring of monarchy is devotion; that everyone is looking to something greater and higher than himself, while, whatever be the theory of democracy, in practice a democracy greatly fosters personal self-seeking, the individual citizen seeing no goal more important than his own well-being and comfort; and a goal like that is as ignoble as it is weakening and unnerving. To look no nearer home, the spectacle of the conflict of politicians in both France and England is hardly reassuring; the fall of a Briand, the formidable activities of a Caillaux, reveal defects and dangers. A democracy may be good; a monarchy may be good. It all depends on the aim of the men who compose them. If that aim be high, founded in spiritual law, consecrated by sacrifice, then it is well. But gross selfishness in a democracy is quite as ugly and dangerous as in a monarchy. Liberty is good; but liberty to do what? Everything depends on that.







"I AM THE MAN."

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We must draw a very clear historical distinction, too, between predatory Houses like the Hohenzollerns or Hapsburgs, who swooped down for prey from their *Habichtsburg*, their "hawk's eyrie," on the Danubian plains, and who have prospered by savage oppression and the enslavement of nations, and such a house as the Romanoffs, who were elected, in February, 1613, by a Constituent Assembly, representing all that was best, noblest and most devoted in the Russian people, both civil and religious. It is of high historic interest that, when that Constituent Assembly met, in the ancient Kremlin, the citadel of Moscow, Russia was at war with foes on her western frontier, who were bent on her destruction, and who were using fraud as well as force in their effort to dislocate the will of the Russian nation, seriously weakened by the long, dire struggle with the Tartars. A war in the West, following a war in the East, makes a close parallel with the present time. Russia was weak from this twofold struggle when the Romanoffs were called.

For several generations the Romanoffs had deserved well of the nation. Their record was unsullied. Archbishop Philaretos was "a lover of virtue" in fact as well as in name. Universally honored, he would doubtless have been chosen instead of his son, young Michael Romanoff, a youth of sixteen, had he not been an ecclesiastic. And so far were they from ambition that the boy passionately refused the high offer tendered to him, when, after a month's search, he was at last found in a monastery. Only the entreaties of the best men of the nation finally overpersuaded him. Since the day when he consented,—curiously enough, almost on the same day of March which saw the downfall of Nicholas the Second,—things began to go well with the little Muscovite kingdom, hemmed in on all sides by enemies; and, in a sense, the growth and consolidation of the vast Russian Empire, which today covers one-sixth of the land surface of the world, has been identical with the history of the Romanoffs. Since the day when Yermak, the Cossack adventurer, burst through the Ural mountains into Siberia, toward the end of Michael Romanoff's reign, Russia has been pushing further and further toward the sunrise, until she at last reached the Pacific Ocean and, for a time, held the great promontory of western North America. Under another Romanoff, Peter the Great, a man of tremendous

energy and genius, Russia hewed her way to the Baltic, her first outlet to the open sea. Thereafter, there was a continual infiltration of German blood, to which, without doubt, much of the obscurantism and oppression of the monarchy (qualities alien to the Russian genius) must be attributed; just as the truculence of the Hanoverian Georges severed two great branches of the English people. But let us be just: one of these Teutons, Catherine the Great, a Romanoff by marriage only, did valuable service in carrying Russia southward to the Black Sea, driving back the Turks, whose rule there was as fatal as it has been in the Balkans or in Armenia. It is curious that the manly Turks, whom most Russians like and admire, should, throughout their history, have made such a tragic failure of the work of government.

The Romanoffs of the nineteenth century will stand forth as great historic figures: Alexander the First, foe and friend and again enemy of Napoleon, an idealist, but with the same quality of morbid mysticism that has been so fatal to Nicholas the Second; Alexander's brother, Nicholas the First, an iron despot, yet a stately personality; Alexander the Second, liberator of the serfs, hailed by the Balkan nations as "the heroic figure from the north": maliciously and unwisely opposed by Disraeli and Bismarck in this second work of liberation, assassinated at the moment when he was ready to anticipate by a quarter century his grandson's work of giving Russia representative institutions; Alexander the Third, censured by many as a reactionary, but greatly admired by more as a sturdy upholder of the Russian spirit; and, finally, Nicholas the Second, who, we must remember, developed the first working plan for world-wide arbitration and dreamed the splendid dream of universal peace.

The monarchy has, without question, borne very heavily upon some of the greatest Russian writers. Pushkin, Lermontoff, Tolstoi and, above all, Dostoyevski, in some things the greatest of them all, in turn felt the iron hand. Yet there are compensations. It was the dire oppression of the Tartars which gave Russian music its characteristic sadness, one of its most valuable qualities; so it was precisely to the concussion with the monarchy that we owe some of the chief works of these Russian writers. Had Pushkin not been exiled to Bessarabia, we should never, in

all likelihood, have had the fine poem on Mazeppa's country; Lermontoff got his finest inspirations, that went to the making of a poem like *Demon*, a prose masterpiece like *A Hero of Our Time*, from his exile in the Caucasus; had Dostoyevski not been sent to Siberia, we should never have had the *Letters from the House of Death*, and the deep strain of tragedy that runs through all his works—and makes them infinitely more precious to the human heart than the novels of easy-going hedonism which more comfortable circumstances bring forth. These considerations, real as they are, will not make us excuse oppression and tyranny; but they may suggest that, in view of the fruits which divine destiny has been able to pluck from oppression and tyranny, God may not be the bungler, in his dealings with the nations, that we sometimes are inclined to think him.

The Romanoffs, then, fill a great place in the history of the Russian nation, in the development of the vast territory now open for the free play of the Russian genius. They fill a great place in the hearts, too, of many Russians, and not the least representative or least worthy. There are, I feel certain, very many who, looking back through three centuries and more to the election of the first Michael Romanoff by the Constituent Assembly of 1613, cherish an earnest hope that the coming Constituent Assembly will again choose a Michael Romanoff to reign over Russia, no longer as an autocrat, but under conditions conformed to the most liberal spirit of our time. These Russians are not quite convinced, perhaps, that the word Democracy settles all things, an "Open sesame" to the earthly paradise. Or they may feel that the earthly paradise is not altogether the best place for our present humanity: they may bethink them that the road to the true earthly paradise lies through the fires of purgatory, of sacrifice, of acceptance of the law.

But the form of their future Government is something that the Russians will decide for themselves. Let us pray that they may so choose as to bring all blessings to a gifted and loyal nation, which believes in honor, in pity, in valor, and in compassion: a nation which has already brought rich gifts to the treasury of mankind, and which seems certain, in the future, to bring even greater and better gifts.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.